



TRAVELLING WITH DIABETES : Diet, Medication & Illness

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People with diabetes can travel all over the world. Diabetes should not be a deterrent to travel even if one is on insulin injections.

The important thing is to make sure the correct preparations are made so that any potential problems are minimised.

Diet:

The diet for people with diabetes is the same health diet which is recommended for everyone so there is usually no restriction. People with diabetes should feel free to choose the usual items they eat in the restaurant whilst at home.

The only problem which may arise is that, when overseas, we often encounter unfamiliar foods and there is also a tendency to overindulge when on holiday. In cases like these where there is a real risk of this happening, please speak to your medical professional. It is not wrong to start additional medications to control blood sugars for a short term period to stabilise things over the holiday period.

If travelling through time zones, please make sure that medications are adjusted appropriately because the day may become longer or shorter depending on which direction you are travelling.

Blood sugars may become abnormal during this time and it is important to discuss with your healthcare professional to see if changes to your medication are needed.

Airlines can provide information on the times of most meals so you can plan your medications. It is best to order a standard meal rather than the 'diabetes' option as this may not supply you with enough carbohydrate to sustain your blood glucose if you are on insulin or medications which can lower your blood sugars excessively.

Cabin crew are usually able to provide fruit, crackers and bread to supplement you if required. There is often a long period between meals in certain flights so caution is advised on long-haul flights.



Medications:

There is usually no restriction bringing personal medications across. However, if bringing large quantities of medication, it is important that you have a doctor's letter allowing you to do so. Bringing insulin needles and lancets are not allowed on the plane unless accompanied by a doctor's letter.

Insulin:

Storage of insulin is crucial. Please do not put them in your suitcase and check the medications in as the extreme temperatures in the plane storage may disintegrate insulin molecules, therefore rendering them useless. Please keep them in your hand luggage with you along with your supplies.

Hypoglycaemia:

This should include a combination of fast-acting and medium-acting carbohydrates such as biscuits. On the plane, cabin crew have a variety of both and it is good to let the airline know that you have diabetes so some prior preparations can be made.

When you have landed, remember that any of the following are effective in treating a hypo: fruit juice, sweets and any non diet soft drink.

Do not forget to take a longer acting carbohydrate after the hypo such as a fruit or biscuits to prevent the blood sugar from dropping again.

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Dealing with illness whilst abroad:

It is important to speak to your doctor for advice before you go. Be aware of the side effects of some of the medications you are on. Be aware that very hot weather can enhance insulin action and strenuous activity can lower blood sugars. Try to be prepared for possible complications.

- If possible, get information from the tourist office or High Commission of the country you are visiting.
- Make sure you check your insurance policy so you know what is covered.
- For your medications, make sure you have a letter from your doctor stating what medications you are on. Make sure the name is generic and not the brand name.
- Carry around your medical alert card or bracelet with you at all times.

Having diabetes should not be a barrier to travel abroad. Simple preparations need to be done prior to embarking on your journey. Other than that, the other precautions for travel are basically similar for everyone else. Please do go off and live life to the fullest.

Happy holidays!



TRAVEL CHECKLIST:

- Carry a diabetes ID card and a letter from your doctor if you are insulin or injectable medication. Have a emergency diabetes alert card/bracelet if you are on medications that can cause hypoglycaemia.
- Ensure you have enough medication supplies. I recommend packing double of what you would normally need.
- If possible, split your diabetes medication and supplies in a different bag. Make sure you have some supplies in your hand luggage in case your suitcase is misplaced.
- Make sure you have a doctor's letter to allow you to take medications abroad.
- Store your insulin well. Hot and cold climates can affect the way insulin works. In extremely hot climates, your insulin need to be stored in a cooler place.
- Travel insurance is strongly advised.